

**Abstract 460**

**TITLE:** Stress of AIDS Caregiving Among Health Care Workers in a Caribbean Community

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**BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES:** Stress factors associated with AIDS are different from those associated with other life-threatening illnesses. The nature, causes and consequences of stress among Caribbean health care professionals are identified. The use of various coping strategies are examined.

**METHODS:** Health care professionals who work primarily with HIV/AIDS patients were given a questionnaire which assessed caregiver stress and related coping strategies. Statistical analyses on sources of stress, symptoms of stress and coping strategies were conducted.

**RESULTS:** Thirty-five health care professionals completed the assessment. For sources of stress, 59.7% of the respondents stated that interpersonal factors such as 'young people dying' and 'fear of getting the disease' were extremely stressful. 62.1% of the respondents indicated that external factors such as 'staff turnover,' 'insufficient staff' and 'lack of training' were moderately to extremely stressful. Symptoms of stress (physical-50.5% of respondents; emotional-39.1% of respondents) were experienced frequently or most of the time. The most frequently used coping strategies included overworking and engaging in recreational activities. The severity of the stress of caregiving resulted in forgetfulness, carelessness and relationship problems.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The stress of caregiving, especially with limited resources, may be compounded by interpersonal and external factors salient to the caregiver. The rates of HIV/AIDS in Caribbean communities are substantially higher than in other communities. Implications for special intervention programs are noted, as caregivers constitute a group at serious risk for physical and mental health problems as a result of prolong and intense exposure to the stresses of caregiving.

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